Bootsole

Recreation and Visual Resources Report

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for:

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Introduction

This report describes existing and desired conditions of the recreation and visual resources within the Bootsole project area and the direct and indirect effects on these resources from implementing the Bootsole Project. It also documents that there would be no significant negative effects on recreation and visual resources, and therefore, no extraordinary circumstances related to these resources, resulting from implementation of the Bootsole Project. Recreation and visual resources are assessed with respect to the Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) and Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) defined in the 1988 Plumas National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP).

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum provides a framework for classifying outdoor recreation opportunity environments on the National Forest. It is based on the premise that the recreation experience of users is a function of both the activity a visitor is participating in and the setting where they are recreating. National Forests are managed to provide a wide range of outdoor recreation opportunities to meet public demand, from remote and primitive to accessible and highly developed.

Visual Quality Objectives are a set of measurable goals for the management of forest visual resources on the National Forest. VQOs are determined by comparing a landscape's variety or diversity with the perceived level of the public's concern for the scenic quality of that landscape on the National Forest. VQOs range from Primitive in areas where only ecological changes are allowed to be visible on the landscape to Maximum Modification where evidence of management activities may provide significant contrast to the characteristic landscape (Bacon 1979).

Summary of Effects

Implementation of the Bootsole Project would have no significant negative effects on the recreation or visual resources within the project area. Therefore, there would be no extraordinary circumstances related to recreation and visual resources resulting from implementation of the Bootsole Project. The area would continue to provide recreation opportunities consistent with the ROS designations of Roaded Modified and Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized. The Bootsole project would meet the VQOs for the project area, and over time, project implementation would enhance the visual character of the landscape

Affected Environment

Existing Condition

The Bootsole Project is located within the Last Chance Management Area of the Plumas National Forest. Within the Bootsole project area, recreation use is dispersed and includes deer hunting, off-road-vehicle riding, sight-seeing by vehicle, and wood gathering. There are no developed recreation trails, campgrounds or other facilities present. A small portion (8 acres) of the Thompson Peak unroaded area is located at the northern tip of the project area (see Figure 1). Recreationists typically access the area via Lassen County Road 208 (Janesville Grade) and visitors to Thompson Peak and Antelope lake frequently travel through the project area. The ROS and VQO designations for the project area are described below and shown in Figures 1 and 2.

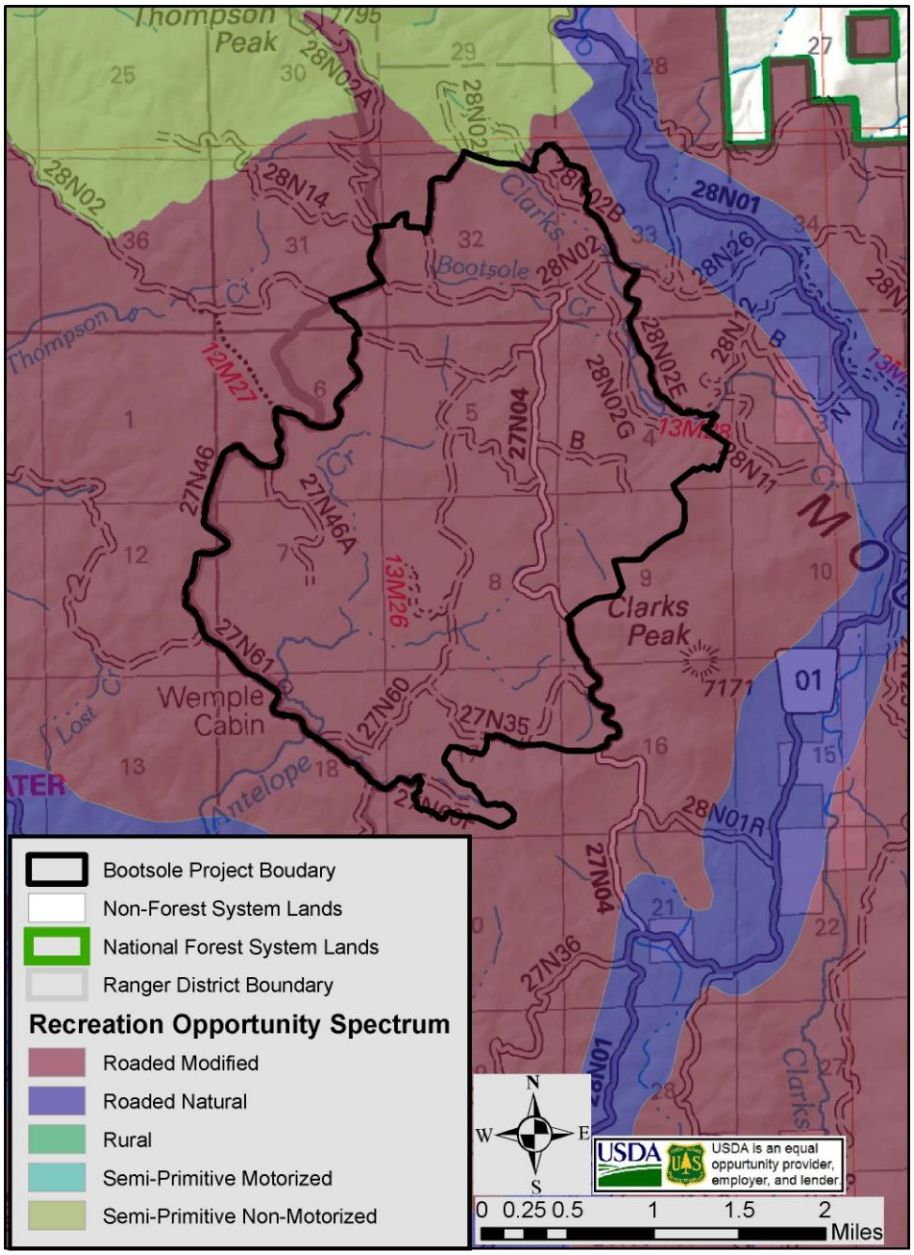

Figure 1: Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Map for the Bootsole Project Area.

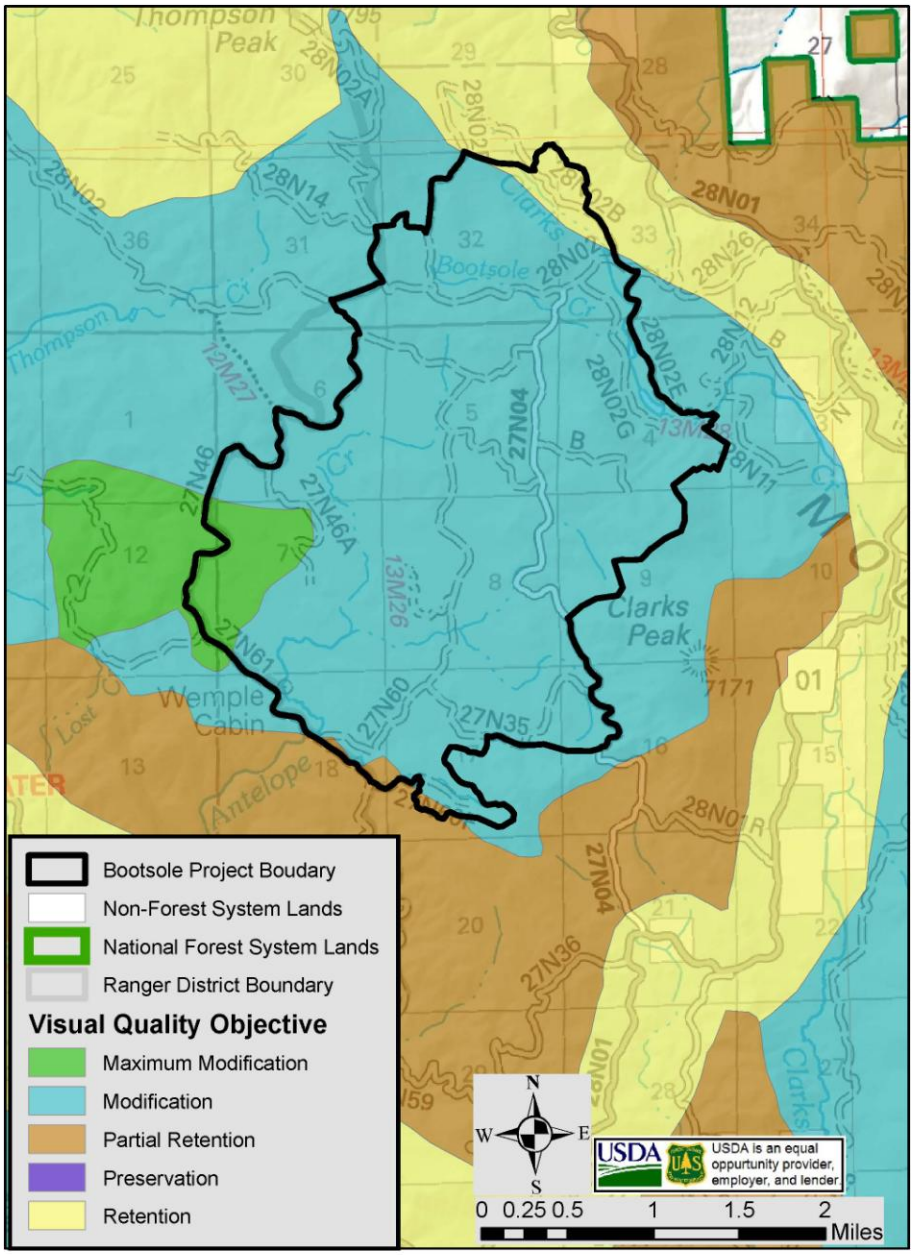

Figure 2: Visual Quality Objectives Map for the Bootsole Project Area.

ROS Designations for the Bootsole Project Area:

Roaded Modified: 4,416 acres

Nearly all of the project area is classified as roaded modified. This area of the Forest is typified by pick-up trucks and many miles of dirt and gravel roads. Other than trails and trailheads, virtually no improvements are present. Users experience low interaction. Roads, landings, slash, and debris are evident. Figure 3 illustrates a typical road within the project area.

Figure 3: An intersection of roads in the Bootsole project area.

Semi-primitive Non-Motorized: 8 acres

Eight acres of the Thompson Peak Roadless Area within the project area are designated Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized. Semi-primitive non-motorized areas are characterized by a predominantly unmodified natural environment of a size and location that provides good to moderate isolation from sights and sounds of people.

There project area contains four VQO designations, however, with the exception of roads and an historic cabin, predominantly resembles a managed yet natural-appearing landscape. The majority of the project area is eastside pine forest with lesser amounts of Sierran mixed conifer forest, aspen stands, pine plantations, and meadows present. Evidence of past timber harvest and current cattle grazing are noticeable to forest visitors. Figures 4 thru 7 provide examples of the scenery that visitors to the Bootsole project area encounter.

Figure 4: An eastside pine stand with white fir in the understory in the Bootsole project area.

Figure 5: An aspen stand surrounded by conifers in the Bootsole project area.

Figure 6: A young plantation in the Bootsole project area.

Figure 7: A grazed meadow with conifers encroaching in the Bootsole project area.

VQO Designations for the Bootsole Project Area:

Modification (M): 4,027 acres

Activities may dominate the characteristic landscape but must, at the same time, utilize naturally established form, line, color, and texture. Activities should appear as a natural occurrence when viewed in the foreground (generally ¼ to ½ mile from the observer) or middleground (generally 3-5 miles from the observer).

Maximum Modification (MM): 242 acres

Activities may dominate the characteristic landscape but should appear as a natural occurrence when viewed as background (beyond 5 miles from the viewer).

Partial Retention (PR): 34 acres

Activities may be evident but must remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape. Changes are noticed but do not attract attention

Retention (R): 119 acres

Provide a natural-appearing landscape where management and other activities are generally not evident to the casual forest visitor.

Desired Condition

The Plumas LRMP provides forest-wide management direction for recreation and visual resources. PNF lands are to be managed to provide a variety of forest-related recreation and VQOs varied according to land use.

The LRMP provides the framework for the desired conditions of the recreation and visual resources. The following Standards and Guidelines address recreation, visual resources, and the interaction of VQOs with timber management in the project area:

- Manage all Forest lands according to Recreation Opportunity Spectrum ROS designations as shown on the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (Figure 1). Manage recreation in the Bootsole project area in accordance with the ROS classes Roaded Natural and Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized.
- Manage all Forest land in accordance with the adopted VQOs as mapped in Figure 2.
- Meet VQOs by designing and implementing management activities to meet or exceed adopted VQOs. Maximum Modification, Modification, Partial Retention, and Retention are present in the project area. Descriptions of these VQOs and their respective management requirements from Bacon (1979) are provided below.
    - *MAXIMUM MODIFICATION. Management activities of vegetative and landform alterations may dominate the characteristic landscape. However, when viewed as background, the visual characteristics must be those of natural occurrences within the surrounding area or character type. When viewed as foreground or middleground, they may not appear to borrow completely from naturally established form, line, color, or texture. Alterations may also be out of scale or contain detail which is incongruent with natural occurrences as seen in foreground or middleground. Introduction of additional parts to these activities such as structures, roads, slash, and root wads must remain visually subordinate to the proposed composition as viewed in background. Duration of Visual Impact: Reduction of contrast should be accomplished within five years.*
    - *MODIFICATION. Under the modification visual quality objective management activities may visually dominate the original characteristic landscape. However, activities of vegetative and land form alteration must borrow from naturally established form, line, color, or texture so completely and at such a scale that its visual characteristics are those of natural occurrences within the surrounding area of character type. Additional parts of these activities such as structures, roads, slash, root wads, etc., must remain visually subordinate to the proposed composition. Activities which are predominately introduction of facilities such as buildings, signs, roads, etc., should borrow naturally established form, line, color and texture so completely and at such scale that its visual characteristics are compatible with the natural surroundings. Duration of Visual Impact: Reduction in*

form, line, color, and texture should be accomplished in the first year or at a minimum should meet existing regional guidelines.

- *PARTIAL RETENTION. Management activities remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape when managed according to the partial retention visual quality objective. Activities may repeat form, line, color, or texture common to the characteristic landscape but changes in their qualities of size, amount, intensity, direction, pattern, etc., remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape. Activities may also introduce form, line, color, or texture which are found infrequently or not at all in the characteristic landscape, but they should remain subordinate to the visual strength of the characteristic landscape. Duration of Visual Impact: Reduction in form, line, color, and texture to meet partial retention should be accomplished as soon after project completion as possible or at a minimum within the first year.*

- *RETENTION. This visual quality objective provides for management activities which are not visually evident. Under Retention, activities may only repeat form, line, color, and texture which are frequently in the characteristic landscape. Changes in their qualities of size, amount, intensity, direction, pattern, etc., should not be evident. Duration of Visual Impact Immediate reduction in form, line, color, and texture contrast in order to meet Retention should be accomplished either during operation or immediately after.*

The LRMP provides the following additional management direction for timber activities in areas designated as Retention or Partial Retention: Compatible with prescription standards and guidelines, schedule timber harvest on lands allocated to Retention and Partial Retention and on these lands, obtain scheduled timber yields thru longer rotations and smaller openings, or uneven-age systems, to meet VQOs. The Standards and Guidelines for timber harvest on lands designated as Retention and Partial Retention are:

- On lands capable of producing 50 cubic feet/acre/year (CMAI), employ all silvicultural systems and harvest methods as appropriate provided landscape management principles and techniques are applied to achieve a VQO of Retention or Partial Retention.
- On the less productive timber lands (20-49 cubic feet/acre/year (CMAI)) maintain a generally continuous forest cover thru uneven-aged systems that achieve a VQO of Retention or Partial Retention.

All stands treated as part of the Bootsole Project, irrespective of productive capability, will be treated to maintain or progress toward uneven-aged structure and will retain generally continuous forest cover.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1 – Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Effects

Direct effects to recreation from forest thinning, prescribed burning, and transportation-related activities would be minimal. During treatment activities, travel and general access through the area may be interrupted occasionally. There would be an increase in noise and large equipment traffic, which may detract from the typically remote feeling experienced when traveling through the area. Increased noise and traffic would be intermittent and short term. The improvement of road surface conditions and visibility resulting from project implementation could bring more

visitors to the area, which would meet National Forest goals for increased recreation use on forest lands. During treatment activities, and immediately afterward, changes to the visual quality of the landscape may be observable but will meet the VQOs for the project area.

Indirectly, vegetation treatments would increase heterogeneity across the landscape by creating variation in stand density, species composition, and by reducing forest fuel loads. A variety of plant communities varying in size, age, and structure would increase diversity in the visual character of the area and improve visual quality. Removing conifers from aspen stands and meadows would increase the diversity of vegetation types and would provide additional variety on the landscape. Collectively, these changes would enhance the visual character of the project area; these improvements would be evident in the season following project implementation and would carry into the future.

Planned treatments would improve habitat for a number of wildlife species, particularly those dependent on aspen and meadow habitats. Removing dense understory vegetation in some areas, could also result in increased browse which could increase the number of deer and improve hunting opportunities for recreationists. Reducing the possibility of stand replacing fires, insect- and disease-related mortality, and improving the landscape's resiliency to disturbance would maintain the Bootsole area in a condition suitable for current recreation uses.

Alternative 2 – No Action

Alternative 2 would have no direct or indirect effects on recreation and visual resources. Recreational activities would continue as they have in the past in accordance with ROS designations for the area. With respect to visual quality, the combination of fuel and vegetation changes within and surrounding the Thompson Peak area during the past century has resulted in a landscape that is less resilient to wildland fire, drought, insects, and disease. The lack of management activities has contributed to the current condition where many stands are overstocked and exhibit signs of insect- and disease-related mortality. Additionally, ingrowth of conifers into aspen stands and meadows has resulted in reduced area of these important plant communities within the project area; with this loss of landscape diversity comes a concomitant loss in visual character. While the Bootsole area is currently an area with high visual quality, if trends in insect- and disease- related mortality and conifer encroachment into aspen stands and meadows continue, then declines in visual quality would be expected.

Compliance with Forest Plan and Other Relevant Laws, Regulations, Policies and Plans

Discuss how well or whether each alternative complies with relevant laws, regulations, policies and/or the Forest Plan. Address the specific standards in the Forest Plan as amended. State why actions are consistent or not consistent with the standard.

References

Bacon, W.R. 1979. The Visual Management System of the Forest Service, USDA. Pages 660-665 *In* Elsner, Gary H., and Richard C. Smardon (technical coordinators). Proceedings of our national landscape: a conference on applied techniques for analysis and management of the visual resource. Gen. Tech. Rep. PSW-35. Berkeley, CA: Pacific Southwest Forest and Range Exp. Stn., Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture: 752 pp.

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